

For immediate release:
September 21, 2005

Contact: Deborah Busemeyer
827-2619, 470-2290

State Announces Eight New West Nile Virus Cases

SANTA FE -- The New Mexico Department of Health announced today that eight more individuals have tested positive for West Nile Virus infection. This brings the state's total to twenty-two human cases of West Nile so far this year.

The new cases are an adult man and an adult woman from Doña Ana County, and two adult males from Colfax and San Juan counties, all with the severe form of West Nile neuroinvasive disease. The following have the less severe West Nile fever: an adult female from Valencia County, an adult male and an adult female from Doña Ana County and an adult female from Chaves County. These are the first cases this year for Chaves, Colfax and San Juan counties.

The twenty-two human cases of West Nile Virus for 2005 come from Doña Ana County (8), Sandoval County (4), Valencia County (3), Bernalillo County (2), Luna County (1), San Juan County (1), Colfax County (1), Chaves County (1) and Socorro County (1). There has been one West Nile Virus fatality this year in an older adult man from Sandoval County.

Animal cases of West Nile have been found throughout New Mexico. Horses have tested positive for West Nile Virus from Doña Ana, Catron, Socorro, Otero and Chaves counties. Mosquitoes have tested positive from Doña Ana, San Juan, Chaves, Eddy, Colfax, and Otero Counties. Also, birds submitted by wildlife personnel from Bernalillo, Santa Fe and Doña Ana counties have tested positive.

"Mosquitoes that carry West Nile virus continue to be a problem due to the recent warm and wet weather. Their populations will stay high until the first hard frost reduces their numbers significantly," said Paul Ettestad, the state public health veterinarian at the New Mexico Department of Health.

West Nile Virus can cause flu-like symptoms, such as fever, nausea, headache, and muscle aches. If someone feels they have the flu and are feeling sick, they should see their health care provider. People older than 50 are at most risk for serious disease from West Nile Virus.

Both meningitis and encephalitis can be fatal, especially in the elderly. However, most people who become infected have either no symptoms or mild symptoms. Less than 1 percent of all people infected, including those who have no symptoms and have not been tested, develop meningitis or encephalitis. Meningitis is an infection of the lining around the brain, while encephalitis is an infection of the brain itself.

The Department of Health continues to recommend that people take the following steps to reduce the risk of West Nile infection:

- Stay indoors at dawn, dusk and in the early evening.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants and socks whenever you are outdoors.
- Products containing DEET or Picaridin can provide longer lasting protection. Use insect repellent products with no more than 35 percent DEET for adults and follow the directions on the label for children from ages 2-12. Natural products containing soybean oil or lemon eucalyptus oil have also been shown to be effective but need to be applied more often.
- Keep windows and doors closed if not screened. If you leave your house doors or windows open, make sure they have screens that fit tightly and have no holes.
- Do not allow water to stagnate in old tires, flowerpots, trash containers, swimming pools, birdbaths, pet bowls, etc.
- Horse owners should contact their veterinarian to have their horses vaccinated against West Nile Virus.

In addition, insect repellants should never be used on pets, according to the National Animal Poison Control Center, which is part of the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine. Dogs and cats tend to lick themselves and can ingest toxins, which could harm them significantly more than the West Nile Virus. So far both species have been fairly resistant to the virus.

Nationally, there have been 1,299 cases of West Nile Virus with 29 fatalities reported in the United States so far this year. In 2004, New Mexico had 88 lab-confirmed cases with four fatalities. In 2003, New Mexico had 209 lab-confirmed cases with four fatalities.

#